



March 17th, 2021

Re: Black and Brown United in Action Testimony in Support of SB. 1 AN ACT EQUALIZING COMPREHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Dear Senator Anwar, Senator Abrams, Rep. Steinberg and Members of the Public Health Committee:

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization located in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of SB. 1 with amendments; the proposed additional bill language was proposed by the CT COVID-19 Hospital Rationing Coalition, submitted and attached to the written testimony of coalition member Sheldon Toubman and Kathy Flaherty. Black and Brown United in Action recognizes racism as a public health crisis and supports and is in solidarity with testimony provided by the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis, Hamden Action Now, Health Equity Solutions, and Power Up CT.

Slavery is the first pandemic endured by Black and Brown people. The cost of liberation was poverty, many slaves were freed but had nothing to support themselves and had to work even harder to survive equally. Equity cannot come without inclusivity, racism does not come without socio-economic impact and to truly deal with an issue superficial approaches and methods only magnify the problem.

You are aware that several Connecticut residents attended the attempted coup in Washington DC on January 1st, and the state flag was flown. You also know that despite a global health pandemic requiring improvised means of interaction including web based platforms such as Zoom, there are language access issues, including no closed captioning, sign language and translation which is both discriminatory and a form of government censorship.

By now you have heard testimony from various members of the community, including organizers, activists, elected officials and others who are representing the community. At this point you would have received quantitative analyses of why race equity matters, why it is financially, and logistically wrong to deny Black and Brown people afford and accessible resources to improve their health, well-being and finances. Also, you would have heard various testimony regarding mental wellness services, most of which would be provided by white led non profits, white led agencies, and white clinicians; once again the liberation of Black and Brown people did not come without a bargain and without the presence of white leadership. In this respect, an established cost to equity has always and continues to be a financial process for Black and Brown people, and seemingly has to be spearheaded by persons who neither represent nor fully understand what racism means.

You may or may not be aware that several organizations and individuals who are supporting this bill with amendments have also reached out to their local and state agencies and representatives, including mayors and educational boards. However, what you may not know is that while these efforts were made, little response was received which is very telling of the road to equity, and demonstrates why racism has always been a public health crisis. You may or may not know that several of these white led agencies and non profits which have proposed and supported this bill, do not practice equity within their four walls. In fact, you may not be surprised to find within such agencies that there are few Black and Brown people leading, making decisions or even being illustrated in Human Resource videos or catalogues when topics such as 'teamwork', 'motivation' and 'equity' are discussed. You may or may not know that including those agencies, and across Connecticut, while Black

and Brown people are recruited and hired, their training and development is hindered by white supremacist leadership and tactics which only serve to ensure that the knee delves deep into the necks of Black and Brown employees.

You may or may not know that while such agencies are audited, HR files are excluded from audits, so frivolous performance improvement plans and write ups go unnoticed, so long as the federally required number of Black and Brown people are employed. It is also acceptable for such agencies to provide program data which excludes key demographic information such as race and ethnicity, progress over time and accurate depictions of what caused or resulted in services being terminated. The fact is, Black and Brown people are paid significantly less with the high production expectation and have been at higher risk of being reprimanded and exploited on the job even in organizations which claim to be serving the community. You may even know that in these same establishments, covert racist terms such as ‘minorities’, ‘off the reservation’, ‘needy’, and other subliminal verbal attacks is a second language. The predominant idea in such white led establishments is to define a need, be granted funds to address the need while ignoring in house colonialist ways, which is not only hypocritical, but has been accepted for too long. Even with agencies such as the Commission of Human Rights, many Black and Brown employees cannot fully fight for their right because Connecticut labor law is such that it encourages and allows for bias and exploitation.

You are also aware that before and from the beginning of this global health pandemic, Black and Brown people have had healthcare access and affordability. You may know some of these people, they have been stocking grocery shelves, providing security services, providing gas station services, disposing trash, delivering mail, providing home healthcare services and more, all of which was done so the economy could go on at cost of their health. All these normalized forms of discrimination is further compounded by lack of access to affordable daycare, lack of access to well paying jobs, lack of access to healthcare, COVID-19 hospital rationing and budgets which use Black and Brown people as budget line items. The COVID-19 global health pandemic only made the known racism more known in Connecticut. Many Black and Brown people have struggled and continue to struggle to carry the economy on their backs from a lack of financial capacity and resources to survive. As did their ancestors, Black and Brown people neither received relief nor empathy as resilience is expected.

Slavery was part of the social contract in Connecticut. The 1756 census concluded that the colony had 3019 slaves, an unquestionable undercount. According to U.S. census data there were 2,764 enslaved human beings in Connecticut as of 1790, a little over 1% of the population at the time. While there were few enslaved people left in Connecticut by 1848, there were 951 counted in the 1800 census, according to slavenorth.com. The gradual emancipation law passed in 1784 was a way to strike a compromise between the aspiration to abolish slavery and the property rights of slaveholders.

By 1800, New Haven had an African American population of approximately 220 people with 60 of whom were still enslaved. Life was still not easy for the freed Blacks. The gentry of New Haven viewed them as a lower working-class group and while they were openly discriminated against, they were also allowed their own institutions and small communities on the fringe of the city’s lines of settlement. On March 8, 1825, the New Haven Green was the site of the final sale of enslaved people in New Haven and arguably the state of Connecticut. They were sold to a local abolitionist named Anthony P. Sanford who for the price of \$10 acquired Lois and Lucy Tritton, and immediately upon purchase set them free. It was a sale conducted by the local sheriff at the old sign post that stood on the corner of Chapel and Church Streets. Sheriffs oversaw the sale of enslaved people and other chattels for the purpose of fair market pricing.

As the COVID-19 pandemic ensued, the world heard George Floyd cry out for his mother. This was followed by Breonna Taylor being shot to death while asleep. In Connecticut, Keren Prescott a single mother afflicted by multiple sclerosis was spat on by a white woman in front of the Hartford Capitol, Catherine John an immigrant, asthmatic also afflicted by carpal tunnel, single mother who like many had internet connectivity issues, who

worked for a community agency located in the midst of a Black and Brown neighborhood was sent into a building to work at the beginning of the pandemic and written up 'performance' after doing as told, Representative Harry Arora was allowed to dissuade public participation, disrespect women, dehumanize Black and Brown people, 'On Scene Media New Haven County' is allowed to publicly share footage of sensitive 'crime' scenes and motor vehicle accidents via social media, 'Hamden Crime Watchers' members shared derogatory posts about Black and Brown people including shooting them to death if they were in the 'wrong place at the wrong time', while the Hamden Police Department found a creative way to reinstate use of force and Mayor Justin Elicker and Governor Ned Lamont found it appropriate to propose taxing marijuana to fund Payments in Lieu of Taxes, while Black and Brown people struggled to get appointments due to double booking and watched white people enter their urban communities to get vaccinated, domestic workers, disabled and elderly people, Black and Brown people with limited english proficiency and having language access issues struggled to testify at public hearings so their needs could be heard and hopefully recognized. All of this normalized white supremacy made it feasible for hospitals to ration COVID-19 pre and post care.

All the fieldwork and research into the COVID-19 global health pandemic neglected the impact on Black and Brown people and heightened the presence of racist practices, language and behaviors which have been allowed in the state for too long. Post pandemic, many Black and Brown people will continue to struggle to pay their rent or mortgage, be treated unfairly and disrespected on the job and paid unequally, struggle to pay rising utility and food costs, have language access issues, be brutalized by the police, be targeted by racists on social media, be exploited by the media, be used as data for projects about them which do not enhance their true well being, be denied access and opportunity to many resources including healthcare, jobs and education, be forced to make daily survival decisions including risking their own lives by sending their children into schools and buildings which are not fully protected, risk their health and safety to keep the economy going - these are just a few chains which have oppressed and will continue to oppress Black and Brown people in Connecticut.

Given that orientation, it is no wonder that it has taken great strides for Connecticut to reach the point of even acknowledging its own oppressive ways. The fact is, racism exists everywhere in this state, so much that a drive down the 95 can be very telling of the income disparity in this state. Connecticut is home to 17 billionaires, neither of whom have a budget to fund or co-sponsor relief efforts. In New Haven, which is also home to Yale University and Yale Hospital, Black and Brown people have struggled to pay rent, to travel, to find daycare, to be educated, to be treated like human beings to this day. As the world finds a way to suppress the coronavirus, Connecticut has found ways to deny Black and Brown people healthcare access. To date, neither Connecticut hospital had led the charge of educating communities of the impact of COVID-19 or contested reopening schools, restaurants and other anti quarantine procedures all of which have impacted the health and safety of Black and Brown communities the most. Privilege is very comfortable in this state, and it is in fact quite expensive to be poor in Connecticut. As noted previously, the systematic, structural and covert racism is quite predominant in Connecticut. While the State of Connecticut claimed to have emancipated slaves, in fact it revised slavery by Legally Allowing White Supremacy. The subjective treatment of equity and inclusivity in Connecticut has been allowed for too long. The equity and inclusion of Black and Brown people goes beyond a budget line item.

Black and Brown United in Action urges you to support SB. 1 including the proposed additional bill language was proposed by the CT COVID-19 Hospital Rationing Coalition, submitted and attached to the written testimony of coalition member Sheldon Toubman and Kathy Flaherty and testimony provided by the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis, Hamden Action Now, Health Equity Solutions, and Power Up CT et al who testified and provided testimony asking you to finally address Connecticut's longest health pandemic, racism.

Sincerely,

Black and Brown United in Action

